
2024-2025 ANNUAL REPORT

APPEALS
COMMISSION
FOR ALBERTA WORKERS' COMPENSATION

Alberta  Government

Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	i
Message from the Minister	1
Message from the Chief Appeals Commissioner and CEO	2
About the Appeals Commission	3
2024-2025 Year in Review: Tribunal	5
2024-2025 Year in Review: Advisor Office	9
2024-2025 Year in Review: Medical Panels Program.....	12
2024-2025 Year in Review: Secretariat.....	13
Finance	14
Decision Review	15

Message from the Minister



I am pleased to present the Annual Report of the Appeals Commission for Alberta Workers' Compensation, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

The Appeals Commission is a tribunal that is the final level of appeal for decisions made by the Workers' Compensation Board (WCB). The Commission operates independently of the WCB under the authority of the *Workers' Compensation Act*, and is accountable to the Minister of Jobs, Economy, Trade and Immigration. The Appeals Commission is also responsible for two additional programs: the Advisor Office, which provides expert, no-cost advice and advocacy to workers and employers in Alberta, and the Medical Panels Program, which convenes panels to answer medical questions posed by the WCB or Appeals Commission.

The Appeals Commission is a key part of a fair and sustainable workers' compensation system. The services offered by the Commission ensure that hardworking Albertans and their employers have an opportunity to be heard, and the resources they need to appeal decisions and bring disputes to resolution.

Thank you to the Appeals Commission for its continued excellence in decision making, and for the services and programs that help maintain safe and healthy workplaces in Alberta.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "JRSchow".

Honourable Joseph Schow

Minister of Jobs, Economy, Trade and Immigration

Message from the Chief Appeals Commissioner and CEO

It is my privilege to share with you the Appeals Commission for Alberta Workers' Compensation's Annual Report for the 2024-25 fiscal year.

This year, I celebrate our team. From Hearing Chairs, to Commissioners, to Advisors, to our professional and administrative staff – in 2024-25, we asked everyone on our team to go above and beyond as we served a growing number of clients at both the Tribunal and Advisor Office. Across the board and without fail, our team delivered, living our values even on the busiest and most challenging days.

You will read about successes from each of our branches later in this report, but I take the opportunity here to highlight accomplishments from this fiscal year that involve our entire organization:

- Being named as a Top Alberta Employer for the seventh year in a row.
- Continued and dedicated work to achieve the objectives in our strategic plan, with a focus on good governance and positioning the Appeals Commission for future success.
- Announcing the first-ever recipients of our unique recognition program, which celebrates team members who demonstrate an exceptional commitment to our values of respect, integrity, accountability and service.

The year ahead looks bright. As I write, I see continued progress on the development of an enhanced case management system, a great new team of adjudicators about to be assigned to hearing panels, and excitement brewing among our Edmonton team as we anticipate a move to a new physical location (one block east of our current location) in 2026.

Thank you to our clients and stakeholders for their trust in the work we are doing here at the Appeals Commission, and for inspiring us to continue to evolve in our service of workers and employers in Alberta. And, as always, thank you to our team for their tireless pursuit of excellence.

Sincerely,



Dale Wispinski, KC

Chief Appeals Commissioner and CEO

About the Appeals Commission

This document reports on the performance of the Appeals Commission from April 1, 2024 to March 31, 2025 inclusive.

Who We Are

The Appeals Commission for Alberta Workers' Compensation is a quasi-judicial tribunal operating under the authority of the *Workers' Compensation Act*. It is the final level of appeal for decisions made by the Workers' Compensation Board (WCB) and is independent from the WCB. The Appeals Commission falls under the responsibility of the Minister of Jobs, Economy, Trade and Immigration and operates at arm's length from the Government of Alberta. The Appeals Commission is committed to a fair, client-focused experience, while demonstrating our values of respect, service, integrity and accountability.

In addition to its adjudicative role, the Appeals Commission is also responsible for operating and administering two independent programs: the Advisor Office and the Medical Panels Program. The Advisor Office provides free-of-charge advice and advocacy services to workers and employers in Alberta. The Medical Panels Program convenes medical professionals to answer medical questions posed by the Appeals Commission or WCB, typically in relation to complex claims. All components of the Appeals Commission are supported by an internal Secretariat, which provides shared services and supports cost savings in facilities management, finance and information technology.

The relationship between the Appeals Commission and its programs is governed by a comprehensive Governance and Independence Framework, which ensures independent and unbiased adjudication, advocacy and medical panels.

Our People

The Chief Appeals Commissioner is the CEO of the Commission and is supported by the Chief Administrative Officer in directing the strategic objectives of the organization as a whole.

At the Tribunal, adjudicators, including the Chief Appeals Commissioner, are recruited through public competition. The competition process is based on a competency matrix, which ensures that our adjudicators meet a high standard of clear and unbiased decision making and reflect the diversity of the communities we serve. Adjudicators are appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council. As of March 31, 2024, the Appeals Commission had 47 adjudicators consisting of one Chief Appeals Commissioner, two Vice Chairs, 16 full-time Hearing Chairs and 28 Commissioners. The Chief Appeals Commissioner oversees the Tribunal with the support of an executive team comprised of two Vice Chairs, General Counsel, and an Executive Director.

At the Advisor Office, 26 Worker Advisors and three Employer Advisors provide advice and assistance to clients, as well as advocacy services before the WCB, the Dispute Resolution and Decision Review Body (DRDRB), and the Appeals Commission. The Advisor Office is led by an Executive Director with the support of General Counsel.

The Medical Panels Program is made up of a Medical Panels Commissioner and a Director. The Medical Panels Commissioner is recruited through a public competition and appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council. The Medical Panels Commissioner is responsible for striking medical panels with the appropriate expertise and ensuring that examinations and reports are timely and of the highest quality.

Across the Appeals Commission and its programs, clients are supported by our talented team of dedicated staff members in areas including legal services, stakeholder engagement, case management and administration.

Our Processes

Appeals are heard by panels made up of three adjudicators who issue a decision that is binding on, and must be implemented by, the WCB within 30 days. Decisions of the Appeals Commission are published on the Canadian Legal Information Institute website (<https://www.canlii.org/en/ab/abwcac/>).

Medical panels are made up of three independent physicians with expertise relating to the questions posed by the Appeals Commission or WCB. These physicians meet with and, if necessary, examine the worker, following which they issue a report that answers the questions posed. Medical panel reports are not published.

2024-2025 Year in Review: Tribunal

At the Tribunal, our core focus is always on processing appeals as efficiently as possible, to the highest standards of fairness and natural justice. Our summary performance data confirms another successful year of client service, with dedicated efforts underway to address opportunities for improvement.

At the same time, work is ongoing to ensure that we understand and meet the evolving needs of our clients while creating a fulfilling and respectful place to work. In 2024-25, we are proud of our many initiatives, including:

- Reviewing all pre- and post-hearing client touchpoints and implementing enhancements to respond to the needs of our diverse client base, particularly those who are new to the Appeals Commission or are unrepresented.
- Commencing work on an ambitious project to benchmark and measure access to justice in the context of workers' compensation appeals tribunals.
- Focusing on client outreach, including the design of guided tours to introduce individuals to our facilities and provide pre-hearing information.
- Continuing our journey towards plain language writing, with all Hearing Chairs participating in a two-day intensive course on plain language decision writing.
- Sharing our knowledge and building our team at regular professional development days.
- Raising funds to help two large families as part of the Edmonton Holiday Hamper program.

Congratulations to our Tribunal team on another successful and innovative year.

Kaitlyn Young, Executive Director

Timelines

The Appeals Commission is committed to processing appeals as quickly as possible, and our performance reflects this commitment. We monitor our timelines on a continual basis and adjust as required to maintain our tradition of excellence in this regard.

We take particular note of two key timeline indicators in our total appeal cycle. These are the combined average number of days from the date the appeal is successfully filed to the first hearing date offered, and the average number of days from the hearing to the decision issue date. While the total appeal cycle is sometimes impacted by operational matters, staffing issues or the complexity of appeals, we are proud of our history of consistent and timely performance.

Average number of days from appeal successfully filed to first available hearing date

For appeals with decisions published in 2024-2025, our average number of days from the date the appeal was successfully filed to first available hearing date was 205.37 days.

In last year's Annual Report, we anticipated that this number would continue to be above target until normalizing in the 2025-2026 fiscal year, and this year's performance is consistent with that prediction. The addition of new Hearing Chairs and additional hearing dates in 2024-25 were essential to achieving this ambitious target and our internal indicators suggest that we are seeing progress. We will continue to monitor this performance indicator in the context of a rising number of new appeals.

Please note that additional delays, which are beyond the control of the Commission, are not included here.

Target	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
150 days	151 days	189 days	205 days

Average number of days from the hearing to the decision issue date

Our adjudicators strive for decisions to be issued within 30 days of the hearing.

Target	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
30 days	29 days	29 days	24 days

The Appeals Commission also tracks the percentage of decisions published within targeted time frames.

Decisions Issued	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
0-30 days	72.83%	74.18%	82.53%
31-60 days	15.75%	15.92%	13.63%
61-90 days	8.68%	7.51%	2.50%
91+ days	2.74%	2.35%	1.34%

Hearings

The type of hearing is requested by a party and ultimately determined by the Appeals Commission. In 2024-2025, we conducted 523 hearings: 132 by teleconference, 209 documentary hearings, 106 in-person, 45 by videoconference, and 31 by a combination of hearing methods. The Appeals Commission has noted the popularity of virtual hearings and will continue to routinely offer teleconference and videoconference hearings as options for our clients.

Representation before the Appeals Commission

The majority of appeal participants appear before the Appeals Commission with the assistance of a representative. In 2024-2025, 52% of appeal participants appeared with a representative from the Advisor Office, 38% appeared with other representatives (for example, lawyers or family members), and 10% represented themselves.

Appeals Received

The number of appeals received is rising on a year-over-year basis and is affected by a variety of factors, including changes in legislation and policy, the rate of resolution at the WCB, and the economic environment. The most popular way to submit an appeal is by email, followed by submission through our website. Clients also have the option of a paper submission through mail or fax.

Application Type	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
Time Extensions	17	23	10
Reconsiderations	43	63	54
Initial Appeals	592	678	782

Appeals Concluded

We remain committed to an efficient appeals process, minimizing any potential backlog. The number of appeals concluded includes appeals dismissed and withdrawn.

Application Type	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
Time Extensions	10	30	8
Reconsiderations	38	43	44

Initial Appeals	487	469	582
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Finalized Issues of Appeal

Each appeal received may contain multiple issues. In the 2024-2025 year, there were 544 issues confirmed, 17 issues varied, 116 referred back to the WCB and 172 issues reversed. This is a similar pattern to previous years.

Top Five Issues of Appeal

The most frequent issues of appeal have remained relatively stable over time.

Issues of Appeal		2023-2024	Issues of Appeal		
1.	Additional Entitlement	172	1.	Additional Entitlement	167
2.	Acceptability of Claim	145	2.	Acceptability of Claim	153
3.	Temporary Total Disability	101	3.	Temporary Total Disability	128
4.	Medical Aid Responsibility	77	4.	ELP Calculation	102
5.	Rehabilitation Services	70	5.	Medical Aid Responsibility	97

2024-2025 Year in Review: Advisor Office

In the 2024–2025 fiscal year, the Advisor Office continued its commitment to improving service delivery to clients, enhancing team member development and engagement, strengthening stakeholder relationships, and striving for operational excellence.

Significantly, the past year saw a 41% overall increase in client requests for Advisor services. This has resulted in an increased waitlist and timeline for service for new clients. To maintain a positive experience amid growing demand, the Advisor Office initiated a project to provide interim customer service support for clients awaiting Advisor assistance. This project is designed to maintain high levels of client satisfaction, while reducing the overall wait time.

Despite this increase in demand, 95% of clients who responded to our exit survey indicated they would recommend the services of the Advisor Office, reflecting the high quality of our work and trust in the support provided by our Advisors.

Other achievements at the Advisor Office in the 2024-2025 fiscal year include:

- Supporting team member development and wellness, including hosting a two-day professional development session and organizing wellness walks.
- Publishing guides and glossaries to support clients navigating the appeals process, and expanding our website content to include new self-help content and guides to common issues of appeal.
- Facilitating a seven-session course on Administrative Law for new team members, developed and taught by in-house Counsel, ensuring a strong foundational understanding of legal frameworks.
- Continuing public outreach activities, ensuring that potential clients are aware of our services.
- Implementing a new Quality Management Plan for the Worker Advisor Branch, accompanied by a comprehensive update to internal file audit tools.
- Launching a job shadowing program to encourage better cross-role understanding and enhance succession planning within the Advisor Office.

These accomplishments highlight the Advisor Office's proactive efforts to enhance the experiences of our clients, staff, and stakeholders, while maintaining a strong focus on quality and continuous improvement.

George Wright, Executive Director

Advisor Office Performance

The Advisor Office has two separate branches, the Worker Advisor Branch and the Employer Advisor Branch. Demand for services from both branches remained high.

	2023-2024	2024-2025
New Worker Clients	1286	1891
New Employer Clients	167	151
Workers Files Closed	1302	1204
Employer Files Closed	153	145
DRDRB Hearings Attended	297	395
Appeals Commission Hearings Attended	218	240

Client Feedback

The Advisor Office consistently receives positive feedback from clients. In 2024-2025, 95% of clients indicated that they would recommend the services provided by the Advisor Office. Below is a sample of some of the comments received from the client survey that the Advisor Office issues upon the closure of its files.

General Client Feedback

“There are many nuances when dealing with WCB files and having someone unbiased to assist with these situations is invaluable.”

“I would highly recommend the service and I wish I had known about this service years earlier.”

Client Feedback about Worker Advisors

“I truly want to emphasize how much your efforts and support have meant to me. Your expertise and willingness to help have made a significant difference, and I’m incredibly grateful for your professionalism and kindness throughout the process. It’s clear that you go above and beyond, and I just wanted to take a moment to acknowledge how much that is appreciated. Thank you for everything!”

“I can’t express my gratitude to the advisor office and my advisor’s help in this case. I would recommend her to anyone. Thank you!”

Client Feedback about Employer Advisors

"I strongly suggest that all industries seek the Advisors office when managing the claims process. If you know you have carried out all the WCB guidelines and need that support to ensure the proper steps are taken, please reach out to this office."

"Overall it was a great experience. Our advisor was very engaging, informative, and supportive. They provided expert advice and recommendations to ensure the appeal process ran smoothly."

2024-2025 Year in Review: Medical Panels Program

In keeping with the Commission's mission, the Medical Panels Program concentrated on improving efficiencies to reduce timelines, contain costs, and deliver a more client-focused service.

Several medical specialists were recruited in 2024-25, including orthopaedic surgeons, psychiatrists, neurologists and physiatrists. This deepened the roster of specialists available for panel duty, reducing medical panel establishment times now, and in the future, and establishing a basis for roster succession planning.

The program also developed and published two important documents: a Practice Guideline to inform clients about the program's criteria, scope and process, and to assist workers in understanding what to expect when a matter is referred to a medical panel; and a Physician's Handbook to orient and assist specialists newly recruited to the program's roster.

Douglass Tadman, KC, Medical Panels Commissioner

Medical Panels Program Performance

By moving to a triage system, the Medical Panels Program reduced service delivery timelines and eliminated a multi-year backlog of cases.

	2023-2024	2024-2025
Active Files as of April 1	2	2
New Medical Panel Referrals Received	2	1
Files Closed	14	1
Active Files as of March 31	2	1

Timelines

The Medical Panels Program is committed to reducing our Days to Panel timeline to 180, and our Days to Report timeline to 240.

	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
Days to Panel	584	463	414
Days to Report	652	553	438

2024-2025 Year in Review: Secretariat

In 2024-2025, the Secretariat focused on advancing digital systems, strengthening internal processes, improving resource access, and supporting team member wellness. These initiatives reflect the Secretariat's ongoing commitment to innovation, service excellence, and continuous improvement across the Commission. Key accomplishments include:

- Making major progress on our case management systems project, which will streamline workflows and enhance overall client experience at the Appeals Commission while ensuring we have a strong technology foundation.
- Welcoming a new Finance team member and adding new tools to improve accessibility and response times, along with more coordinated financial communication.
- Developing resources and tip sheets to assist team members with day-to-day tasks and updating important forms to be more intuitive and user-friendly.
- With all leases for our Edmonton offices in the Standard Life Building set to expire, planning for our relocation to the CWB Building, which is located one block east of our current space. As we design our new facilities, we are focused on client accessibility and creating a safe and comfortable workspace for our team members.
- Launching a new Lunch n' Learn series aimed at encouraging informal learning and supporting overall well-being in the workplace, reflecting our commitment to fostering a healthy, balanced and supportive work environment.

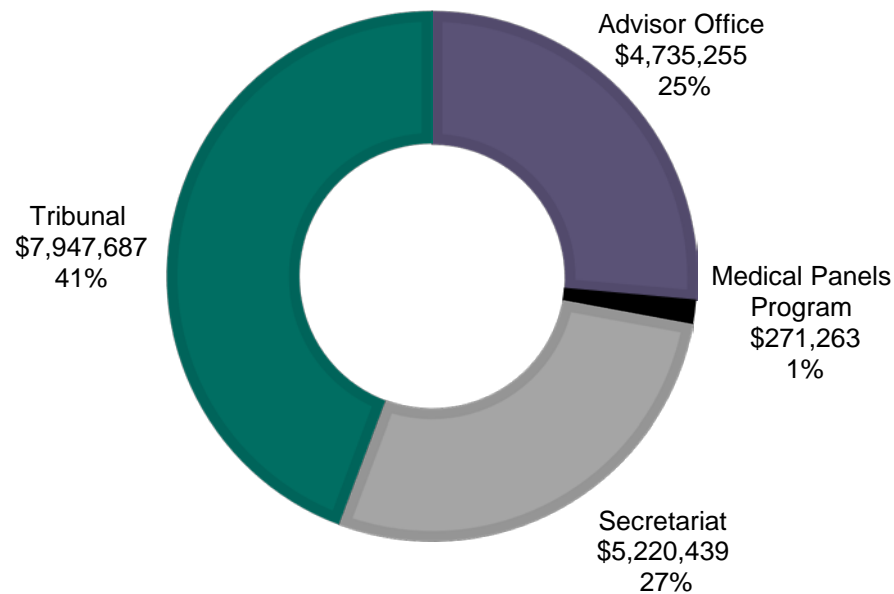
In the year ahead, we look forward to conducting another Employee Engagement Survey to assess the impact of these efforts and gather feedback that will help guide our planning for the years ahead.

Stephanie Bossio, Director, Secretariat

Finance

Fiscal responsibility continues to be a priority for the Appeals Commission. In this fiscal year, we ran a consolidated budget encompassing all of our programs. Total Appeals Commission expenditures in 2024-2025 amounted to 95% of our budget. All our major program operational expenses (such as rent and information technology support) are accounted for through the Secretariat.

Cost Overview



Decision Review

Appeal participants who are dissatisfied with an appeal decision have several options for further review, including a reconsideration, judicial review and statutory appeal application to the Court of King's Bench, a further appeal to the Court of Appeal or a complaint to the Alberta Ombudsman. In 2024-2025, the percentage of decisions unchallenged or upheld exceeded our target of 98%.

Judicial Review

From April 1, 2024, to March 31, 2025, the Alberta courts issued three reported decisions and one unreported decision with respect to judicial review applications or statutory appeals of decisions of the Appeals Commission.

Reported Decisions

1. In 2024 ABKB 725, the Court of King's Bench dismissed the application on the basis that the Appeals Commission's Decision was reasonable. The Applicant argued that the Decision improperly weighed evidence and erred to consider relevant policy/legislation. The Court concluded that the Decision was rational and logical and followed a clear path of reasoning.
2. In 2025 ABKB 22, the Court of King's Bench dismissed the application on the basis that the Appeals Commission's process was procedurally fair, and the Decision was reasonable. The Applicant argued that the hearing before the Appeals Commission was procedurally unfair and the panel failed to appropriately weigh the evidence. The Court concluded that the process was fair and the Decision was intelligible, transparent and justified.
3. In 2025 ABKB 26, the Court of King's Bench dismissed the application on the basis that the Appeals Commission's Decision was reasonable and correct. The Applicant argued that the Appeals Commission application of policy was incorrect. The Court concluded that the Appeals Commission correctly interpreted the policy.

Unreported Decisions

1. On September 19, 2024, the Court of King's Bench orally dismissed an application for judicial review of an Appeals Commission Decision. The Applicant argued that the Appeals Commission's Decision was inconsistent with prior decisions and legal precedent. The Court concluded that the Decision was reasonable as the Appeals Commission correctly identified the law, addressed all necessary arguments and provided reasons.

Court of Appeal

From April 1, 2024, to March 31, 2025, there were no Court of Appeal decisions relating to an Appeals Commission decision.

The Ombudsman

From April 1, 2024, to March 31, 2025, there were nine complaints relating to Appeals Commission decisions resulting in informal requests for information using the Ombudsman's early resolution process. Eight of the early resolution complaints resulted in a finding that the Appeals Commission decisions were administratively fair. The remaining complaint was open as of fiscal year end.

For more information, please visit:

www.appealscommission.ab.ca

<https://advisoroffice.alberta.ca>

<https://medicalpanels.alberta.ca>

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